AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-27 (Canceled).

28. (New) An unwinding device for unwinding reels of web material comprising a rotating element with supports for at least two reels and a splicing member to join a first web material coming from an expiring reel to an initial free end of a second web material wound on a new reel; wherein at least one mechanical member is associated with each support of said supports to retain the initial free end of the new reel disposed on the support.

29. (New) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said at least one mechanical member comprises at least one arm extending radially from said support and at least one retaining element carried by a free end of said at least one arm, said retaining element extending substantially parallel to an axis of the new reel disposed on said support.

30. (New) Device as claimed in claim 29, wherein said retaining element is a roller.

31. (New) Device as claimed in claim 30, wherein said roller is supported idle on said arm.

32. (New) Device as claimed in claim 30, wherein said arm is adjustable in length.

33. (New) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said at least one mechanical member is torsionally connectable to the support and is releasable therefrom, to rotate with the new reel disposed on said support or to remain in an idle condition while said new reel rotates.

34. (New) Device as claimed in claim 29, wherein said retaining element is movable with respect to the arm.

35. (New) Device as claimed in claim 34, wherein said retaining element cooperates with an actuator which controls withdrawal of the retaining element from the new reel disposed on said support when the second web material wound thereon is joined to the first web material of the expiring reel, withdrawal releasing the retaining element from the reel.

36. (New) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said mechanical member comprises an elastic element.

37. (New) Device as claimed in claim 36, wherein said elastic element is connectable reversibly at one end to be released when the initial free end of the second web material of the new reel is to be joined to the first web material.

38. (New) Device as claimed in claim 36, wherein two hooking members of said elastic element are associated with each of said supports, one of said hooking members

cooperating with an actuator which controls release of the elastic element.

39. (New) Device as claimed in claim 28, wherein said splicing member comprises a roller and a cutting blade to cut the first web material coming from the expiring reel.

40. (New) Device as claimed in claim 28, further comprising a ply-bonding unit.

41. (New) Method for continuously feeding a web material wound on a reel to a processing machine comprising:

– feeding a first web material at a feed speed from a first reel;

– carrying in rotation a second reel with a second web material;

– when the feed speed of the first web material is essentially same as a peripheral speed of the second reel, joining the first web material to the second web material and interrupting the first web material upstream of a splicing area between the first web material and the second web material;

wherein an initial free end of the second web material is held adherent to the second reel, until splicing of the first web material and the second web material, by at least one mechanical member which rotates with said second reel;

and carrying said at least one mechanical member to an idle position after said splicing.

42. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, further comprising applying an adhesive means to an external surface of the second reel in a withdrawn position, in a direction of rotation of the second reel, with respect to a position in which said mechanical member holds the initial free end of the second web material.

43. (New) Method as claimed in claim 42, further comprising pressing together the first web material and the second web material at a level of said adhesive means to cause said splicing of said first web material and said second web material.

44. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein said first web material and said second web material each comprise at least one ply of tissue paper.

45. (New) Method as claimed in claim 44, wherein each of said at least one ply of tissue paper has a weight per unit of surface ranging from 15 to 60 g/m^2.

46. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein said first web material and said second web material comprise more than one ply and wherein plies of an end portion of

the first web material are joined together before said splicing to the second web material.

47. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein said mechanical member is torsionally connected to a support of the second reel rotating therewith, and said mechanical member is released from said support during splicing of the first web material and the second web material.

48. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein said mechanical member is torsionally connected to a respective reel and said mechanical member is released from said respective reel during said splicing of the first web material and the second web material, withdrawing the mechanical member from an external surface of the respective reel.

49. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, wherein the initial free end of the second web material is held by an elastic mechanical member.

50. (New) Method as claimed in claim 49, wherein one end of the elastic mechanical member is released during said splicing of the first web material and the second web material.

51. (New) Method as claimed in claim 41, further comprising a pressure member acting on a surface of said second reel at least in an area between said mechanical

retaining member and an area of reciprocal adhesion between the first web material and the second web material.

52. (New) Method as claimed in claim 51, further comprising applying a strip of double-sided adhesive tape to an external surface of said second reel, in said area of reciprocal adhesion.

53. (New) An unwinding device for unwinding reels of web material comprising:

– a rotating element with supports for at least two reels, said rotating element additionally carrying at least two rollers;

– a splicing member to join a first web material coming from an expiring reel to an initial free end of a second web material wound on a new reel;

– at least one mechanical member associated with each support of said supports, to retain the initial free end of the new reel;

– a ply-bonding unit, including ply-bonding wheels for joining plies of the first web material together stably before splicing to the second web material, said ply-bonding wheels cooperating alternatively with a respective one of said rollers.

54. (New) Device according to claim 53, wherein said rotating element includes a pair of arms supporting said rollers.

55. (New) Device according to claim 54, wherein said rotating element includes a further pair of arms carrying said supports.

56. (New) Device according to claim 53, wherein said ply-bonding unit is constructed and arranged to stably join together the plies of said first web material coming from said expiring reel before said splicing to the second web material coming from the new reel.

57. (New) Device according to claim 56, wherein said ply-bonding unit is arranged to act upstream of the splicing member.

58. (New) An unwinding device for unwinding reels of web material comprising:

– a rotating element with supports for at least two reels;

– a splicing member to join a first web material coming from an expiring reel to an initial free end of a second web material wound on a new reel;

– at least one mechanical member associated with each of said supports, to retain the initial free end of the new reel disposed on a respective one of said supports;

– wherein each mechanical member comprises an elastic element having one end reversibly connectable to the respective one of said supports by a hooking member associated with the respective one of the supports, said hooking member cooperating with an actuator which controls release of the elastic element when the initial free end of the second web material is to be joined to the first web material.

59. (New) Device according to claim 58, wherein each said elastic element includes two hooking members associated with each of said supports.

60. (New) Device according to claim 58, wherein a first end of each elastic element is fixed to a first disc or arm integral with the respective one of said supports and a second end of said elastic element is reversibly connectable to a second disc or arm integral with said respective one of said supports.

61. (New) Device according to claim 59, wherein a first end of each elastic element is fixed to a first disc or arm integral with the respective one of said supports and a second end of said elastic element is reversibly connectable to a second disc or arm integral with said respective one of said supports.